

Aravind Adiga

 Contemporary Authors Online, 2009

- **Born:** 1974 in India, Chennai
- **Nationality:** Indian
- **Occupation:** Novelist

WRITINGS:

- *The White Tiger: A Novel*, Free Press (New York, NY), 2008.

Also a contributor to the *Financial Times*, the *Independent* (London, England), and the *Sunday Times* (London, England).

Writer. *Time* magazine, correspondent, 2003-05.

Man Booker Prize, Book Trust, 2008, for *The White Tiger: A Novel*.

Born 1974, in Chennai (formerly Madras), India. **Education:** Attended Columbia and Oxford universities.

Addresses: Home: Mumbai, India.

"Sidelights"

Born in Madras (modern Chennai), India, and raised in India and Australia, Aravind Adiga published his debut book, *The White Tiger: A Novel*, in 2008. A former correspondent for *Time* magazine, he has also written articles for the *Financial Times*, the *Independent*, and the *Sunday Times*.

The protagonist of *The White Tiger*, Balram Halwai, lives as a young entrepreneur in Bangalore, the center of India's high-tech boom. Through a series of seven letters to China's Premier Wen Jiabao, who is about to pay a visit, Balram recounts his life story and his view of India as two separate countries: the Light and the Darkness. Like many, he was born into the Darkness, a world of landlord and peasant. The son of a poor rickshaw-puller, Balram grew up in a small coal-mining village in the state of Bihar. As the top student in his small village school, he is promised a scholarship by a visiting dignitary. His chance for a real education is lost, however, when a loan shark, who financed a relative's wedding, forces him into servitude in order to pay the debt. Later, Balram teaches himself to drive and is hired as a chauffeur for a local landlord and his two sons. He moves to New Delhi with the landlord's youngest son, Mr. Ashok. As a coal-trading businessman, Ashok has experience in bribery and the corruption of public officials. Balram, who is determined to live like his master, sees an opportunity to rise from servitude. He cuts his employer's throat and uses Ashok's bribe money to start a soon-flourishing business. "Along with the events that lead up to the crime, we catch glimpses of the sort of indignities and injustices endemic to a

country that's still emerging from decades of political, economic, and social dysfunction--teachers who don't teach, hospitals without doctors," noted *New York Sun* reviewer Scott Medintz, who also noted that "Balram proves to be a seriously charming sociopath."

When asked by an interviewer for *BookBrowse* where the inspiration for Balram came from, Adiga replied, "Balram Halwai is a composite of various men I've met when traveling through India. I spend a lot of my time loitering about train stations, or bus stands, or servants' quarters and slums, and I listen and talk to the people around me. There's a kind of continuous murmur or growl beneath middle-class life in India, and this noise never gets recorded. Balram is what you'd hear if one day the drains and faucets in your house started talking."

The White Tiger, which won the Man Booker Prize in 2008, earned praise for its insight into a world not often seen in novels about India. Reviewing *The White Tiger* for *Mostly Fiction*, Sudheer Apte related that "the most enjoyable part of this novel is the richly observed world of the have-nots in India: the flocks of drivers hanging out by their vehicles outside air-conditioned buildings, waiting for their masters to summon them; the beggars at traffic stops, who get money mostly from the poor; the petty manipulations among the servants of the house. This is the view missing from so many India novels with a middle-class sensibility. And with his keen observations and sharp writing, Adiga takes us into Balram Halwai's mind, whether we want to or not." The book "is a furious and brutally effective counterblast to smug 'India is shining' rhetoric. ... It is certain of its mission, and pursues it with an undeviating determination you wouldn't expect in a first novel," wrote the London *Telegraph's* Peter Robins, who also noted that the book's "caricatures are sharply and confidently drawn."

Some reviewers did level a few criticisms. For example, a *Kirkus Reviews* contributor said that although Adiga "writes forcefully about a corrupt culture, ... his commentary on all things Indian comes at the expense of narrative suspense and character development." *Jabberwock's* Jai Arjun Singh remarked that "the device of Balram addressing the Chinese Premier didn't always work for me--it sometimes felt like a forced attempt to make *The White Tiger* as topical as possible." Singh went on to say that the book "can cut uncomfortably close to the bone for anyone who's ever reflected that the bill they just paid for a restaurant meal amounted to half of their driver's monthly salary. ... Or for anyone who's seen their domestic staff chatting with friends in the nearby park while casting occasional glances at the house, and wondered about the nature of the gossip being exchanged. Adiga makes us think about these things as well as about the many Indias and the different types of aspirations and frustrations they represent, but he does it within the framework of an absorbing novel." *The White Tiger's* "plot is somewhat predictable," but the book "suffers little for this fault," commented David Mattin in a review of the book for the London *Independent*. Mattin added, "Brimming with idiosyncrasy, sarcastic, cunning, and often hilarious, Balram is reminiscent of the endless talkers that populate the novels of the great Czech novelist Bohumil Hrabal. Inventing such a character is no small feat for a first-time novelist."

Further Readings

PERIODICALS

- *Bookseller*, May 4, 2007, Alison Bone, "Mirchandani Grabs Tiger Tale," p. 19; January 11, 2008, Callum Pownall, review of *The White Tiger: A Novel*, p. 13.
- *Book World*, June 8, 2008, Tony D'Souza, "Changing Lanes," p. 6.
- *Economist*, September 13, 2008, review of *The White Tiger*.
- *Houston Chronicle*, September 10, 2008, "Two First-timers in the Running for Man Booker Award; No Stars Are among the 6 Nominees," p. 2.
- *Independent* (London, England), May 11, 2008, David Mattin, review of *The White Tiger*.
- *Kirkus Reviews*, February 15, 2008, review of *The White Tiger*.
- *Library Journal*, February 15, 2008, Evelyn Beck, review of *The White Tiger*, p. 89.
- *National Post*, May 31, 2008, Randy Boyagoda, "The White Tiger," p. WP13.
- *Newsday*, September 7, 2008, review of *The White Tiger*.
- *New Statesman*, March 31, 2008, Nakul Krishna, "Getting and Spending," p. 59.
- *New Yorker*, April 14, 2008, review of *The White Tiger*, p. 75.
- *New York Sun*, April 29, 2008, Scott Medintz, review of *The White Tiger*.
- *Publishers Weekly*, May 7, 2007, "'Tiger' to Free Press," p. 14; January 14, 2008, review of *The White Tiger*, p. 37; June 30, 2008, review of *The White Tiger*, p. 181.
- *Telegraph* (London, England), August 9, 2008, Peter Robins, review of *The White Tiger*.
- *Weekend Edition Saturday*, May 17, 2008, "In White Tiger, Killer Exploits India's Caste System."

ONLINE

- *BookBrowse*, <http://www.bookbrowse.com/> (November 10, 2008), author interview.
- *Jabberwock*, <http://jaiarjun.blogspot.com/> (April 23, 2008), Jai Arjun Singh, review of *The White Tiger*.
- *Man Booker Prizes Web site*, <http://www.themanbookerprize.com/> (November 10, 2008), author interview.
- *Mostly Fiction*, <http://www.mostlyfiction.com/> (September 9, 2008), Sudheer Apte, review of *The White Tiger*.*

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